

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## SUMMARY

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) prepared this Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR), pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), for the 2004 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP or “the Plan”). The 2004 RTP is a long-range regional transportation plan that provides a blueprint to help achieve a coordinated and balanced regional transportation system. The RTP includes a policy element that is shaped by goals, policies, and performance indicators, an action element that identifies projects, programs, and implementation, and a description of regional growth trends that identifies future needs for travel and goods movement. The PEIR for the 2004 RTP serves as an informational document to inform decision-makers and the public of the potential environmental consequences of approving the proposed Plan, and it includes alternatives and mitigation measures designed to help avoid or minimize significant environmental impacts.

## SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This PEIR fulfills the requirements of the CEQA. It is a programmatic document that provides a region-wide assessment of the potential significant environmental effects of implementing the projects, programs, and policies included in the proposed 2004 RTP. A PEIR “may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related either: (1) Geographically, (2) As logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions, (3) In connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program, or (4) As individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar ways” (CEQA Guidelines Section 15168). A PEIR provides a regional consideration of cumulative effects and includes broad policy alternatives and program wide mitigation measures. This PEIR offers useful regional-scale analysis and mitigation for subsequent, site-specific environmental reviews conducted by implementing agencies as individual projects in the RTP are developed.

The focus of the environmental analysis in this PEIR is on the potential regional-scale and cumulative impacts of implementation of the Plan and the alternatives. The long-range planning horizon of more than 25 years necessitates that many of the highway, arterial, goods movement, and transit projects included in the Plan and the alternatives are identified at the conceptual level, and this document addresses environmental impacts to the level that they can be assessed without undue speculation. This PEIR acknowledges this uncertainty and incorporates these realities into the methodology to evaluate the environmental effects of the 2004 RTP, given its long-term planning horizon.

The potential significant environmental effects of implementing the Plan were identified by employing multiple analytical methods, including spatial analysis, transportation, noise, and air quality modeling, and other quantitative, ordinal, and qualitative techniques. Spatial analysis using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) was employed to evaluate the potential effects of



the major freeway, rail, and transit projects on numerous resource categories, such as land use, biological, and water resources. Sophisticated transportation, noise, and air quality simulation models were used to estimate the transportation, noise, and air quality impacts. Project and policy elements of the Plan and alternatives were incorporated into the modeling analysis and into the socioeconomic projections. The specific techniques used to evaluate each potential environmental effect are fully described in each resource section in Chapter Three of this document.

### **Baseline for Determining Significance**

The PEIR must identify significant impacts that would be expected to result from implementation of the 2004 RTP. Significant impacts are defined as “a substantial or potentially substantial, adverse change in the environment” (Public Resources Code § 21068). Significant impacts must be determined by applying explicit significance criteria to compare the future Plan conditions to the existing environmental setting (CEQA Guidelines § 15126.2(a)). The existing setting is described in detail in each resource section of Chapter Three of this document, and represents the most recent, reliable, and representative data to describe current regional conditions. The criteria for determining significance are included in each resource section in Chapter Three of this document.

### **Comparison with the No Project**

It is important to emphasize that urbanization in the SCAG region will increase substantially by 2030, with or without implementation of the 2004 RTP, and the CEQA-required environmental baseline of current conditions means that the impact assessment for many of the resource categories is cumulative in nature. Therefore, the analysis for each resource category also includes a direct comparison between the expected future conditions with the proposed Plan and the expected future conditions if no Plan were adopted. This evaluation is not included in the determination of the significance of impacts; however, it provides a meaningful perspective on the effects of implementing the 2004 RTP. A direct comparison between the proposed Plan and the No Project Alternative (defined below) is included in each resource section of Chapter Three of this document.

### **Proposed Plan and RTP EIR Alternatives**

This PEIR evaluates a reasonable range of alternative regional transportation plans at an equal level of detail. The alternatives evaluated for the RTP Environmental Impact Report (EIR) include:

The proposed **Plan** is a blueprint to help achieve a coordinated and balanced regional transportation system. The Plan contains transportation and urban-form strategies that encourage compact growth, increased jobs/housing balance, and centers-based development, where feasible, in all parts of the region. The proposed Plan is fully described in the Project Description (Chapter Two of this document).

The **No Project** Alternative includes only those programmed transportation projects that received federal environmental clearance by December 2002. These reasonably foreseeable projects fulfill the definition of the mandated CEQA No Project Alternative (CEQA Guidelines § 15126.6(e)).

The **2001 RTP Modified** Alternative is an update of the adopted 2001 RTP to reflect the most recent growth estimates and transportation planning decisions and assumptions. This Alternative does not include urban-form strategies.

The **PILUT<sup>1</sup> 1 (Infill)** Alternative includes transportation and urban-form strategies that encourage a substantial portion of future growth to concentrate in existing urban centers through infill and redevelopment. This Alternative was designed by Fregonese Calthorpe Associates, SCAG's consultant, to reduce consumption of open space and habitat compared to the 2004 RTP. The PILUT 1 Alternative analyzed in this PEIR represents one potential vision of what could occur if the investments, urban form strategies, and goals of this Alternative were fully realized. Overall, impacts from the PILUT 1 Alternative would be less adverse than the Plan for each resource category, and the PILUT 1 alternative is the environmentally superior alternative.

The **PILUT 2 (Fifth Ring)** Alternative includes transportation and urban-form strategies that encourage a more decentralized urban form, with many compact, infill-intense urban centers throughout the region, resulting in an improvement in the jobs/housing balance in the outlying areas. Specifically, PILUT 2 focuses on improving and expanding infrastructure to utilize undeveloped land on the outer edges of the urbanized area. The PILUT 2 Alternative analyzed in this EIR represents a relatively compact, centers-based vision of what could occur if the investments, urban form strategies, and goals of this Alternative were fully realized.

Each alternative maintains a constant population total in 2030. The year 2030 growth projection for each Alternative differs from one another in two ways: 1) numbers of households and jobs and/or 2) distribution of people, households and jobs. The alternatives differ in terms of numbers of households and jobs because different investments in the alternatives would be expected to stimulate different levels of job creation and household development. The alternatives differ in terms of the distribution because the different transportation investments and urban form strategies would be expected to support different regional distributions of population, households, and employment.

### **Mitigation Measures**

Mitigation measures proposed in the PEIR can be incorporated as policies into the Final 2004 RTP and into the updated Regional Comprehensive Plan, as appropriate and feasible. This integration of mitigation with regional plans would help ensure that feasible measures are

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<sup>1</sup> The development of the 2004 RTP proceeded via an integrated process called Planning for Integrated Land Use and Transportation, or PILUT (see page 1-4). The regional growth visioning effort, known as Southern California Compass, guided this process and contributed two contrasting alternatives to the 2004 RTP that were analyzed in this PEIR, known as PILUT 1 and PILUT 2.

implemented at the project level. The implementing agencies shall be responsible for ensuring adherence to the mitigation measures prior to construction. SCAG shall be provided with documentation of compliance with mitigation measures through SCAG's monitoring efforts, including SCAG's Intergovernmental Review Process.

### **Public Participation Process**

SCAG has employed an innovative planning process that integrates transportation, land-use, and the environment. The process, known as PILUT—Planning for Integrated Land Use and Transportation—has been guided by Compass Growth Visioning, which is a participatory effort to help move Southern California towards a more sustainable future. Active participation from decision-makers, stakeholders, and the public is helping ensure that the process is relevant, inclusive, and useful.

As the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), SCAG is required to implement a public involvement process to provide complete information, timely public notice, and full public access to key decisions and to support early and continuing public involvement in developing its regional plans. SCAG formally adopted a Public Participation Program in September 1993. Further, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and associated regulations and policies, including President Clinton's 1994 Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice, seek to assure that minority and low-income populations are involved in the planning process.

To fulfill these expectations, SCAG has used a combination of methods to stimulate public involvement. For the development of the 2004 RTP, the following public outreach methods have been used:

- Presentations on the RTP to established organizations throughout the Region
- Public workshops on the RTP throughout the Region
- Posting of all public outreach events via an Outreach calendar on the SCAG web site
- Direct outreach to minority and low-income populations
- Development of written and visual material to communicate the status and content of the RTP, including fact sheets and presentations.
- A public comment form used throughout the outreach program (in person, at public meetings and online)
- SCAG's web site, featuring a section dedicated to the 2004 RTP, including public meeting notices and the latest written information on the RTP
- Outreach to media including newspaper editorial boards, local television and radio stations, and ethnic media

- Selected radio and television appearances by elected officials and senior SCAG staff.

In addition to these targeted outreach efforts, all regular and special meetings of the RTP task forces, the Transportation and Communications Committee and the SCAG Regional Council are publicly noticed and opportunities for public comment are provided. Specific public comments on the RTP are being recorded and considered by SCAG in the development of the 2004 RTP.

In preparing the 2004 RTP, twelve task force committees (i.e. Aviation, Goods Movement, Transit, etc.), including several subcommittees, worked for more than two years to identify and refine Plan components. Each assigned task force committee, comprised of elected officials and regional stakeholders, held numerous meetings focused on development of specific transportation modes and transportation and urban form strategies.

## ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines § 15082, the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the 2004 RTP PEIR was released on June 9, 2003, and was received and circulated by the State Clearinghouse (SCH) on June 13, 2003. In response to NOP comments and a desire to encourage additional participation in the RTP EIR process, SCAG convened an RTP EIR scoping meeting on September 16<sup>th</sup>, and extended the comment period to end on September 25, 2003. A copy of the original NOP is included in the Technical Appendices. SCAG received dozens of comments on the NOP, which are included in Technical Appendices, and incorporated appropriate comments into the scope and methodology of the environmental analysis of this document. Continuing participation from interested agencies and individuals is encouraged throughout the RTP EIR process.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE PEIR

This document is organized into eight Chapters plus an Executive Summary. The Executive Summary contains a review of the expected environmental impacts of implementation of the proposed 2004 RTP and the measures recommended to mitigate those impacts. The summary also includes a comparison of the expected environmental effects of each RTP EIR Alternative.

**Chapter 1: Introduction.** This Chapter is comprised of this introduction and analytical approach. It describes the purpose, scope and methodology of the PEIR, the Environmental Review Process, and an overview of the contents of the PEIR.

**Chapter 2: Project Description.** In this Chapter the background and location of the RTP is given including a review of the state and federal legislation that guides the process of developing the RTP. A discussion of the purpose and need for the 2004 RTP is presented with the projected growth in the region. An overview of the major components of the 2004 RTP is presented.

**Chapter 3: Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures.** This Chapter identifies the setting for the 2004 RTP and provides a detailed analysis of the 2004 RTP for the region. It examines the environmental impacts of the 2004 RTP on the following categories: Land Use, Population, Employment and Housing, Transportation, Air Quality, Noise, Aesthetics and Views,



Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Geology, Soils and Seismicity, Hazardous Materials, Energy, Water Resources, and Public Services and Utilities. For each of these environmental areas the analysis addresses the Environmental Setting, Regulatory Setting, Methodology, Significance Criteria, and Impacts and Mitigation Measures.

**Chapter 4: Comparison of Alternatives.** In this Chapter the RTP PEIR alternatives are evaluated and compared to the 2004 RTP for each resource area, such as land use and energy.

**Chapter 5: Long Term Effects.** This Chapter identifies the significant unavoidable environmental changes, significant irreversible impacts, growth-inducing impacts, and cumulative impacts of the 2004 RTP.

**Chapter 6: Report Authors, Organizations, Persons Consulted, References, and Acronyms.** This Chapter lists the contributors, references and the acronyms used in the preparation of this PEIR.

**Chapter 7: Technical Appendices.** This Chapter includes the NOP, Responses to Notice of Preparation, Air Emissions Tables, Biological Resource Tables - California Department of Fish and Game Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB), Water Resources Tables, Cultural Resources Data, and Sites in the SCAG Region Listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

**Chapter 8: Figures.** This Chapter includes all the Figures referenced throughout the PEIR.